

THE BROKEN CHILD

BY

GARY PARR

parrtothepeople@gmail.com

FADE IN:

INT. INTERVIEW ROOM - DAY

A typical small and cramped police interview room. A basic bare, sterile box, the concrete walls are an unattractive off-white.

In the middle of the room is a small table, two uncomfortable-looking chairs on either side.

One chair is empty, in the other sits a small boy(6ish) wearing a school uniform in various shades of grey.

The boy sits hunched in his chair and looks fearfully around the room.

The sound of a monotonously ticking clock fills the air.

After a few beats, a door behind the boy opens and a MAN(30s) enters. He is casually dressed in jeans, t-shirt, and worn sneakers.

The boy flinches when the door opens and hunches down even more.

The man stares at the back of the boy's head, his face a mask of uncertainty.

He frowns, shakes his head, and turns to leave. As he reaches for the door handle, he pauses. Turning back to the boy, he takes a deep breath and moves to the other chair.

As he sits down, he can see how afraid the boy is. He's trembling and has tears in his eyes.

The man shifts in his chair, clearly uncomfortable. Finally, he places both hands flat on the table in front of him.

MAN

(softly)

It's ok kid, you don't have to be afraid.

The man slowly takes in the room and looks pained.

MAN (CONT'D)

Admittedly, I don't blame you. I'm not feeling this place either. If I was better at this we'd probably be in a MacDonalds. You like MacDonalds kid?

No response, the boy just stares at the desk, not making any eye contact.

MAN (CONT'D)

What am I saying, off course you like MacDonalds. Who doesn't like MacDonalds?

The man realizes he's started to ramble.

MAN (CONT'D)

Ok, I feel like I've said MacDonalds far too much. Shall we talk about something else?

Still no response. The man sits back, stroking his chin as he contemplates the boy.

MAN (CONT'D)

Why don't we start with something easy? Can you tell me your name?

The man waits for a couple of beats, before carrying on.

MAN (CONT'D)

My name's JOHN.

Finally the boy looks up, staring tentatively at John.

BOY

(quietly)

My name's kinda like that, I'm JOHNNY.

John smiles warmly across the desk.

JOHN

Well what about that, we're nearly identical name twins.

The moment is lost and Johnny goes back to staring at the desk.

JOHN (CONT'D)

I meant what I said kid, you don't have to be scared. I won't hurt you.

Johnny shakes his head in denial.

JOHNNY

I'm not supposed to talk to strangers, I'll get in trouble.

JOHN

Tell you what Johnny, why don't you ask me some questions. The more you ask, the less of a stranger I'll be.

JOHNNY

(distressed)

Can't I just go home? I want to go home.

JOHN

Don't get upset. Please. I just want to talk to you.

It's too late, Johnny completely closes down. Tears pour down his face and he stares at nothing.

A look of frustration crosses John's face. He gets up and walks to a wall-mounted phone next to the door and picks up the receiver.

JOHN (CONT'D)

(quietly)

This isn't working.

A man's voice on the other end answers(O.S.) It sounds faint and tinny.

VOICE (O.S.)

You have to keep going. This is important.

JOHN

So you keep saying. But if I can't get him to talk then what's the point?

VOICE (O.S.)

No one said this was going to be easy. You're dealing with a heavily traumatized child. You just need to find a way to draw him out.

John sighs heavily.

JOHN

(whispering)

Fine! I'll keep trying.

John hangs up and sits down. He stares across at Johnny with a mixture of concern and uncertainty.

JOHN (CONT'D)

I know you're scared Johnny, but I don't think it's me you're afraid of. Someone hurt you, didn't they?

John pauses briefly, gets no response.

JOHN (CONT'D)
It was your dad, wasn't it?

At the mention of his father Johnny shudders and fresh tears appear in his eyes.

John decides to stop talking, watching Johnny instead, his face a mask of concern.

Silence grows between them for several beats. Finally, Johnny looks up.

JOHNNY
It was my fault. I did a bad thing.

Encouraged by the response, John leans forward.

JOHN
What bad thing?

Johnny shrugs.

JOHNNY
I knocked over the Christmas tree, and lots of the shiny balls smashed.

JOHN
Did you do it on purpose?

JOHNNY
No, I tripped.

JOHN
But your dad punished you anyway.

Johnny lowers his gaze and nods.

JOHN (CONT'D)
What did he do to you?

Johnny doesn't reply, withdrawing again.

JOHN (CONT'D)
You think your dad's going to be mad if you talk to me, don't you?

Johnny nods again.

JOHN (CONT'D)

I'm going to promise you something, and it's a cross my heart and hope to die promise. You can't break a promise like that, you know that right?

JOHNNY

I guess.

JOHN

Ok, whatever happens in here, whatever you tell me, or show me, I promise that your dad will never hurt you again.

John uses a finger to make a cross sign on his chest.

JOHN (CONT'D)

There we go, I can even pinky swear if you want.

John moves his closed hand across the desk, his little finger sticks out.

Johnny stares at it for several moments before grasping it with his little finger.

After a quick shake, they separate.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Now nothing bad can happen to you.

Johnny sighs with relief and relaxes a little, but quickly tenses up again.

JOHNNY

Am I going to jail?

JOHN

Of course not buddy. You don't go to prison for knocking over Christmas trees.

JOHNNY

But what about all the other bad things I did? Daddy says I need to be punished.

JOHN

The only person that's done bad things is your dad.

Johnny still looks unconvinced but John ploughs ahead.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Now, what did your dad do to you when you knocked the Christmas tree over?

JOHNNY

He took his belt off and hit me.

JOHN

Where did he hit you?

JOHNNY

On my back. But I deserved it, daddy said so.

John grinds his teeth in anger.

JOHN

Can you show me?

JOHNNY

No, daddy wouldn't like that. He told me not to let people see.

JOHN

It's ok, you can show me. I pinky swore, remember? Nothing bad's gonna happen.

Johnny thinks about it, clearly conflicted. He looks at John who smiles back at him.

After several moments, Johnny begins to take his jumper off, then his tie, then finally his shirt.

John gets up and moves around to examine Johnny's back. There are several raised, angry-looking welts across his back. In one place the indentation of a belt buckle mars his skin.

Anger flashes across John's face and it takes several moments to compose himself.

Finally, he goes back to sit down.

JOHN (CONT'D)

You can get dressed again, Johnny. Thank you for showing me that, you're a pretty brave kid.

Johnny shakes his head in denial, then begins to put his clothes back on.

JOHNNY

I'm not brave. I'm scared all the time.

JOHN

Let me tell you a secret, when I was your age I was always scared too. Especially of my dad.

JOHNNY

Really?

JOHN

You bet. And when I got really scared I had this secret place I could go and hide.

JOHNNY

Hey! Me too.

JOHN

Good. But I couldn't hide away forever. And when I came out, the scary things were still there.

Johnny nods in understanding.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Do you want to know what I did to stop feeling scared?

Johnny perks up eagerly.

JOHNNY

What?

JOHN

Well, one of my teachers saw how sad I was, and he talked to me. And I talked to him about the things that scared me, about the things my dad did, And he helped me not to be scared anymore.

Johnny's not convinced.

JOHNNY

Did your daddy get angry?

JOHN

He did. But the teacher helped protect me. Soon my dad couldn't hurt me anymore.

JOHNNY

Can he help me too?

JOHN

I'm afraid not. But I can, and I'll always be here to make sure you feel safe.

JOHNNY

So, no more belt? I don't like the belt.

JOHN

No more belts, or sticks, or wooden spoons. No more punishments.

JOHNNY

But what if I do a bad thing again.

JOHN

Johnny, I want you to listen to me carefully, this is very important. Your dad is a bad man. All the times he punished you and hurt you, he was wrong. You didn't deserve any of it. And all the times he told you that you were bad, or not worth anything, he was wrong about that as well. Do you understand?

Johnny frowns in confusion.

JOHNNY

No.

JOHN

That's ok kid, because I'll be here to keep telling you until you finally start to believe it.

JOHNNY

Why?

JOHN

Because you matter.

Johnny freezes in place, the clock stops ticking.

John gets up and moves over to the phone, he picks up and holds the receiver to his ear.

JOHN (CONT'D)

I think I'm done here.

He pauses briefly.

JOHN (CONT'D)

For now.

The same tinny, distant voice answers (O.S.)

VOICE (O.S.)

Alright, let's get you out of there.

John replaces the receiver and closes his eyes.

CUT TO:

INT. PSYCHOTHERAPISTS OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

A brightly lit, warm and cosy room.

John sits in a comfortable leather chair with his eyes closed, his breathing is deep and even.

Across from John sits MICHAEL(60s). He is grey-haired with a neatly trimmed beard. He is wearing a grey, three-piece tweed suit and bowtie. He has a writing pad on his knee in which he is making notes.

After several seconds he finishes writing and looks up at John.

MICHAEL

Ok John, whenever you're ready you can open your eyes.

John does so straight away, he stares back at Michael.

JOHN

What? No countdown from five?

Michael raises an eyebrow.

MICHAEL

I'm not a stage hypnotist.

JOHN

You've got that right. I'm sure they're a lot more fun.

Michael ignores the remark, remaining professional

MICHAEL

How did you find the exercise?

JOHN

I hated it!

MICHAEL

Can you tell me why?

JOHN

Because it's ridiculous. There's no way I could ever help that child. All the damage has already been done, and there's nothing you or me can do to change that.

MICHAEL

You're right, you can't change what's already happened. But the inner child exercise isn't about changing the past, it's about acceptance and empathy.

JOHN

Hey! I've got empathy coming out my ears.

MICHAEL

You have, but only for other people. You never let yourself feel your own pain.

JOHN

So what? Talking to Johnny was supposed to help me process my trauma?

MICHAEL

You tell me. How did it feel to see him suffering?

JOHN

It made me feel sad and angry. He didn't deserve any of the stuff that happened to him.

MICHAEL

Bingo!

JOHN

Ok, I get it. I need to give myself the same compassion as I do everyone else.

MICHAEL

It's certainly something we can work on.

Michael checks his watch and puts his pad down on the table between them.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

And we're going to have to leave it there for now.

John sighs dramatically.

JOHN

Why is it when we get close to a breakthrough our time is always up?

MICHAEL

Well, admitting that we're close to a breakthrough is a breakthrough in itself.

John gets up from his chair.

JOHN

Touché. Same time next week?

John picks up a bag beside his chair and moves to the door.

MICHAEL

Off course. One last thing though, when did you switch from Johnny to just John?

JOHN

When I left home to go to uni. I actually thought I could reinvent myself, but I was still the same damaged mess I always was. So, I guess what they say is true, "wherever you go, there you are."

MICHAEL

And who are you now?

JOHN

I'm the guy that has to wait another week to find out.

Both men smile at each other and John leaves.

FADE OUT.